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ABSTRACT

The ultimate purpose of curriculum planning is to arrange an array of stimuli or opportunities to extend or modify the knowledge, skills, or attitudes of identifiable learners. A curriculum might be defined, then, as a set of intended learnings. Three kinds of decisionmaking realms and three corresponding perspectives for inquiry make up the domain of curriculum. These realms involve political negotiations, curricular substance, and established practice. Such decisions are made at societal, institutional, and instructional levels in the hierarchy of schooling. To satisfy the different realms of decisionmaking, differing data sources must be brought into play in the search for tenable answers and solutions. These sources include funded knowledge, conventional wisdom, and the ideological sources of theorists and researchers. It is because educational institutions tend to draw their data for decisionmaking from the safety of conventional wisdom that schools are conservatively oriented and that the most controversial and potent thrusts of innovation are blunted.
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CURRICULUM DECISIONS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK *

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Curriculum planning is a very practical activity. It goes on constantly wherever there are people responsible for or seeking to plan an educational institution or program. Involved in the process are legislators, school board members, professional administrators, researchers, teachers and sometimes students, together with a host of laymen concerned with what should be learned and how learnings should be arranged and packaged. Any adequate conceptualization of these processes and participants must encompass a reasonable approximation of the whole, if only at some rather broad levels of generality. The purpose of this paper is to present such a conceptualization.¹

The ultimate purpose of curriculum planning is to arrange for identifiable learners an array of stimuli or opportunities to extend or modify their knowledge, skills or attitudes. A curriculum might be defined, then, as sets of intended learnings. When state legislators pass laws regarding the teaching of the dangers of drug abuse, the inclusion of physical education, or requirements outlining the time to be spent on given subjects, they are engaging in curriculum planning. When local school boards decree that reading will be taught according to a hierarchy of specific, behavioral objectives, they are involved in curriculum planning. When school staffs decide to use

1. What follows is derived in part from John I. Goodlad (with Maurice N. Richter, Jr.) The Development of a Conceptual System for Dealing with Problems of Curriculum and Instruction. HEW Contract No. SAE-80204, Project No. 454. Los Angeles: University of California, 1966.

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television broadcasts as a basis for interesting students in current events, they are engaged in curriculum planning. When individual teachers decide to use selected library books for enriching the language arts offerings, they are involved in curriculum planning.

Curriculum planning is much more, then, than the preparation of school district courses of studies or new instructional materials for the schools. Sorting out what this planning consists of, what ^{the} decisions are, and who is making them constitutes a major part of the study of curriculum. This is a naturalistic process of determining what exists with respect to ongoing practice. Strangely, it has received surprisingly little attention.² Curriculum planning includes, also, determining what ought to be the intended learnings for students in educational programs. This normative process has attracted enormous attention, projections for what would be better frequently being set forth with little prior knowledge of what already exists. The study of curriculum planning encompasses both existing curricular conditions and projections ^{at} ~~for~~ alternative plans. Clearly, methods of inquiry involved in these two kinds of studies differ quite sharply. Succeeding papers devote attention to both kinds of processes.

Kinds of Decisions

The preceding brief exposition suggests three kinds of decision-making realms and three parallel or corresponding perspectives for inquiry making up the domain of curriculum. The first is political. It involves all those human processes by means of which certain interests come to prevail over others. The second is substantive. It includes all those normative issues of what should be included in curricula by way of ends and means. The third kind of

². Joseph J. Schwab, The Practical: A Language for Curriculum. Center for the Study of Instruction. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1970.

decision-making pertains to human action in implementing or effecting curricula, the study of which falls within praxeology.

The term "political" is not used here in any pejorative sense. It pertains to those processes through which differing views of what is desirable are placed in competition and, usually, achieve at least a temporary status of primacy. Views usually range from those representing short-term selfish interests to those embracing noble images of the future. In curriculum planning, governmental leaders choose, for example, between alternative views of the creation of man and of how capital should be distributed. Their choices place restrictions on the freedom exercised by local school boards in determining the ends and means of schools under their jurisdiction. Likewise, the choices of both legislators and school board members have far-reaching implications for what boys and girls study in the lower schools.

State and local authorities sometimes go so far in specifying their choices that few degrees of freedom in decision-making remain for school administrators and teachers. Some of the degrees of freedom these decision-makers have frequently are usurped by administrators, leaving little alternative for teachers to do other than teach pre-prepared lessons. To be held accountable for achieving progress with diverse groups of students under such circumstances is to place teachers in unenviable circumstances of considerable responsibility and little accompanying authority. The kinds of curriculum decisions made by various individuals and

groups in the political hierarchy of decision-making is a potentially productive realm for curriculum inquiry. Such inquiry could provide a useful knowledge base for entering into policy decisions about who should make what kinds of decisions pertaining to the ends and means of education and schooling.

The subsequent paper by Henry Hill raises some provocative questions about curriculum matters attracting the attention of state legislators and how much they should concern themselves with classroom or instructional specifics.³ Gary Griffin's paper, in turn, focuses attention on the intent to which various parties in the decision-making hierarchy are, indeed, involved in decision-making processes which might be judged appropriate for them in a democratic society.

Substantive decisions take us into all these questions of goals, what to teach, how to arrange what is to be learned, evaluation procedures and the like which have been grist for the mills of curriculum planners, theorists, and researchers for many years.⁵ There is no point in seeking to enumerate the list here. Most of the items on it pertain to justifying the ends or intent of curricula and what is to be included for their attainment.

Decisions in the realm of praxis pertain primarily to the

³Henry Hill, from unpublished doctoral dissertation.

⁴Gary Griffin, from unpublished doctoral dissertation.

⁵For example, a little monograph by Ralph W. Tyler, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950, appearing in mimeographed form first in about 1946, has guided thousands of students in the curriculum field for over a quarter of a century.

qualities to be expressed in the implementation of curricula such as economy, efficiency, humaneness, and the like.

Praxeology, as expressed in the study of practical curriculum affairs, has focused on such matters as how to achieve several goals simultaneously, how to organize learnings so that they build efficiently on each other, how to make curriculum materials more interesting, and so on. It is fair to say that psychological considerations have tended to outweigh philosophical ones in recent years, with how to plan the curriculum more efficiently tending to over-ride questions of whether existing ingredients are worth having at all, let alone deserving of the time required to arrange them differently.

LEVELS OF DECISION-MAKING

The preceding analysis assumes that curriculum decision-making is conducted at several levels of remoteness from those for whom learnings are intended. Legislators at federal and state levels pass laws and vote funds which affect whether certain topics appear in the lessons of students in the schools and the preparation of materials for such lessons. State legislators sometimes determine how much time will be devoted to them and whether they will be taught daily or on an unspecified schedule. Local school board members further prescribe the curriculum, frequently specifying which books may or may not be used.

These federal, state, and local lay decisions are classified here and in several subsequent papers as societal. Although these take place in a political context, the decisions are no less substantive than those made at other levels by professionals.

And they certainly embrace matters of praxis, particularly those involving questions of financial economy. Professionals are not loathe to seek to influence these societal decisions.

Taken together, the decisions of federal, state and local lay bodies in large measure prescribe the curriculum of schools and systems of schools -- the institutional level of decision-making. School personnel must interpret or translate the more general societal decisions into more specific curricular meaning. There is much less of this kind of activity than often is assumed, curriculum elements coming from sources existing quite outside of the formal hierarchy of public schooling such as textbook publishers. In fact, it is fair to say that the ends and means of curricula frequently are determined by textbook publishers and not by the elected representatives of the people, although the process is a cyclical one, with the identification of who is influencing whom being exceedingly difficult.

At the institutional level, much more is involved than simply interpreting for or by schools the meaning of societal-level decisions. A transactional process, as well, is involved whereby professionals bargain for additions to or changes in what they perceive to be the meaning of the intended learnings formulated more remotely. Traditionally, the transactional agent has been the superintendent but recent years of growing teacher militancy have seen erosion in his authority. Now, teachers frequently include curricular matters in the bargaining package and have forced superintendents often to be identified

with societal agents. This potentiality for increasing authority for curriculum planning at a level close to students has not yet been very much exploited. In fact, for a short period in the recent history of higher education, it appeared that student authority might achieve considerable status at the institutional level.

Once societal intent has been translated into curricular specifics and transactional processes are more or less dormant, professionals in schools are in a position to know the degree of freedom in planning available to them. However, this kind of clarity and stability rarely is achieved. Further, it appears that the kind of curriculum planning occurring beyond the school, either at the level of school board and superintendent or at even more remote levels, is designed to guide or direct the instructional activities of individual teachers more than the curricular structure of the school as a whole. Consequently, not much of either translating the institutional curriculum or negotiating with the principal and staff as a whole is required of individual teachers at the instructional level of decision-making. At this level, teachers negotiate with students either directly or by assuming that they have the students' proxy by the law of required attendance.

We see, then, that there are decisions involving political negotiations, curricular substance, and praxis at societal, institutional, and instructional levels in the hierarchy of schooling. Griffin's study testifies to the existence of all

three.⁶ It suggests, also, the probability that the institutional level may be the most inactive. My own studies with colleagues tend to support this conclusion.⁷ Perhaps the principal, teachers, students and parents of local schools should constitute a more powerful decision-making unit, interesting itself in the political as well as the other aspects of curriculum decision-making. It is possible that, in this way, schools would be reconstructed to become more potent educational entities.

Institutional planning is enormously difficult and demanding, as we see in the reports of Edith Buchanan⁸ and Robert McClure.⁹ Nonetheless, strengthening this weak link in the curriculum planning process may be exceedingly important in the search for improved ways to improve student learning.

DATA-SOURCES

Since curriculum planning involves three difficult realms of decision-making -- political, substantive and praxis -- differing data-sources must be brought into play in the search for tenable answers and solutions. If curriculum planning were fully rational -- which, of course, it is not--funded knowledge

⁶Griffin, op. cit.

⁷John I. Goodlad, M. Frances Klein and Associates, Behind the Classroom Door (rev. ed.). Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones, 1973; and John I. Goodlad, M. Frances Klein, Jerrold M. Novotney and Associates, Early Schooling in the United States. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.

⁸Summarized from several years of work by the Early Childhood Unit, the University Elementary School, U.C.L.A.

⁹Robert M. McClure, from unpublished doctoral dissertation.

from a host of fields and contexts would provide the prime data-source. But the existence of knowledge does not assure its use. There is disagreement, of course, over what constitutes valid knowledge, and the level of education possessed by a society has something to do with the extent to which that society values knowledge as a basis for choosing among alternatives. Even when data appear to be very hard, there are those who reject it because they believe in their right to have opinions in all realms. They do not want their opinions to be upset by the availability of data.

The data brought into social and political decision-making usually are classified more realistically as conventional wisdom rather than funded knowledge. Politicians seek both to shape and to appeal to conventional wisdom. Consequently, even their most enlightened decisions usually fall short of serious recourse to funded knowledge, especially when it is relatively far removed from, or not congruent with, the conventional wisdom. Nonetheless, they frequently do seek to bring valid knowledge into decisions, especially when the goal is to raise the level of conventional wisdom through educational processes.

We would hope that professional educators would draw almost exclusively from funded knowledge in curriculum planning but this is not the case. If their decisions outrun conventional wisdom to a considerable extent, adhering to them will be fraught with difficulty, as most administrators know full well. Therefore, schools and school systems tend to be conservative

institutions, preserving what is already central to the thinking of the majority and, therefore, safe. We should not be surprised to learn that schools tend to blunt or flatten out the most controversial and potent thrusts of innovations.

Curriculum decision-making draws upon data pertaining to societal conditions and trends (usually compiled by economists, sociologists, political scientists and futurists); popular opinion (usually compiled by survey researchers and pollsters); child development, the nature of learning, youth problems and the like (usually resulting from the work of behavioral scientists, especially psychologists); knowledge in the various subject-fields (accumulated by specialists in the disciplines commonly taught in or considered for the schools); and matters of efficiency (provided by economists, systems analysts, planners, etc.). Philosophical analyses pertaining to the nature of truth, knowledge, the good life, and the good society are much less often sought out these days. In regard to matters of value, our rich heritage of logical thought and normative discourse tends to be ignored in favor of individual or group opinion.

psychologists,

Most of the curriculum planning discussed so far has been placed within the context of political processes and human engineering. But there is also a conceptual process, seeking to consider curriculum matters more dispassionately or objectively. There are processes of inquiry within the field of study identified as "curriculum." Theorists and researchers

seek to explain curriculum realities and to find common realms for inquiry and knowledge-based alternatives for each commonplace demarcating the field. They speak of validating ends, clarifying objectives, principles of continuity and sequence, organizing elements, organizing centers, evaluative criteria, and so forth.

Their decision-making processes are ideological. They produce guidelines for curriculum development, cautions against excessive stress or untested assumptions, tools for curriculum development and even societal, institutional or instructional exemplar curricula. In her paper, Frances Klein discusses the usefulness of a well-known taxonomical tool for curriculum planning activities in the classroom.¹⁰

Curriculum planning takes place when a society envisions possibilities for improving upon present conditions, translates its perception of the gap between present realities and envisioned possibilities into goals and assigns responsibility for achieving these goals to educational institutions. Sometimes these goals involve only improvement upon functions already performed. Such goals are conservative, calling upon citizens for improved performance along already-accepted lines. Sometimes, however, goals are radical, calling for new ways of behaving and the utmost in personal effort and sacrifice. In most developed countries, a major goal in curriculum planning is to choose funded knowledge over conventional wisdom at all levels of decision-making.

¹⁰ M. Frances Klein, from unpublished doctoral dissertation.